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ABSTRACT

This topical newsletter focuses on ways to convert segregated day programs for people with disabilities into community integrated employment programs. Individual sections cover: common "conversion" myths and appropriate responses; a national status report on conversion; Florida's innovative use of the Medicaid waiver to fund conversion; a consumer's view on employment; a blueprint for conversion (a four-step process for organizations); and barriers to successful conversion (contrasting a "disability focus" with an "ability focus"). Two books, one addressing vocational programs for students with severe disabilities and the other, addressing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, are discussed. (DB)

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Conversion: The Time Is NOW!
Katherine J. Inge, Ed.

RRTC
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University

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RRTC

"Improving Supported Employment Outcomes for Individuals with the Most Severe Disabilities"

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Conversion: The Time is NOW!

Few would argue that in the past decade community integration, supported employment, and self-determination have been the hallmarks of human service rhetoric. Thousands of people with developmental disabilities have returned to their communities from institutions, and thousands more have left sheltered workshops to enter the nations competitive workforce. Legislation has been crafted such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Developmental Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, for the purpose of promoting community integration, integrated employment, and the opportunity to control one's own destiny.

However, as we enter the middle of this decade, consumers, families, and advocates must ask themselves the following questions. What has actually been accomplished on behalf of adults with developmental disabilities? Have those individuals who want to work in the community been provided sufficient access to supported employment? Are "well meaning" professionals still keeping adults who would prefer integrated community employment in segregated facilities?

Supported employment has offered many individuals with severe disabilities the opportunities and challenges of a real job in their local communities. In fact, most people who work in the field of rehabilitation would admit that the knowledge for placing people into competitive employment is greater than it ever has been. Yet, there exists a very troubling incongruity between what we know how to do, and what actually is occurring. **We must examine carefully whether the promises that have been made to consumers with disabilities have been kept or whether we have hit a maddening plateau.**

It is true that all 50 states are participating in supported employment and have shown dramatic increases of people who are successfully working. In 1986, the numbers were under 10,000 per year, and, as of 1991, the numbers exceeded **90,000**. Although supported employment has expanded as a service, it remains as an "add-on" to existing segregated service options. In fact, there are **over a million people**, at least, who remain behind in segregated day programs. Why is this? What impetus will it take for day programs to open their doors and let the consumers who want to leave for work do so?

Day programs must convert to community employment, and consumers must lead the way. If states do not fund local programs at attractive rates for supported employment and if local programs choose not to provide community employment opportunities, then consumers must stand up for themselves. They must demand to choose among a number of different career alternatives which will provide satisfying wages and fringe benefits, suitable working conditions, and opportunities for career advancement.

A reasonable question to ask may be whether consumers would choose to stay in an activity center, sheltered workshop, or at home if given the opportunity to participate in the community. I think that few people would remain if they were provided the appropriate supports to work competitively. Ask yourself this question. Do you know anyone who wanted to return to an adult activity center after being successfully employed in a real job?

The challenges that face us are many. We must advance a set of national goals and public policy strategies to take supported employment implementation to a higher level. Policies that provide fiscal incentives to agencies who provide supported employment must be developed and limits on funding levels imposed for day programs that offer primarily segregated services. States will have to set annual goals for including people with severe disabilities in supported employment. We will need to develop innovative ways to expand the use of existing funding sources for supported employment outcomes. Ultimately, we must provide access to community employment for those individuals who wish to leave segregated facilities.

This topical report discusses the issue of conversion. In short, are professionals assisting people with disabilities to empower themselves in the workforce? Are they being allowed the dignity of risk, the self-esteem attached to real work, and the chance for a true career? To answer these questions this report will profile ways to convert segregated day programs to community integrated employment programs that provide consumers with career opportunities.

Paul Wehman

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Common "Conversion" Myths

If you or your organization believe any of the following misconceptions, this newsletter is written for you. Don't get left behind! There's never been a more exciting time to be in the field of rehabilitation.

Common Myth	Response
1. **Individuals with severe disabilities would rather remain in the workshop with their friends.**	**Individuals with disabilities can develop strong ties of friendship in community jobs** as well as in sheltered employment. It is important to provide them with the skills to maintain friendships during non-work hours regardless of where the initial relationships developed. It is not necessary for friendships to end, because individuals move to different employment locations.
2. **Consumer choice is not a reality. Individuals with severe disabilities don't know what they want to do.**	**All individuals are capable of making choices!** Individuals with severe disabilities can make their job preferences known if we take the time to provide them with job experiences through situational assessments. Observation of the consumer's job performance and non-verbal communication during assessment can provide valuable information for determining job choices.
3. **Parents don't want community-based employment for their sons or daughters.**	**Have we allowed parents to dream and hope for their sons' and daughters' futures?** At one time, parents thought the goal for their son's or daughter's future was sheltered employment. Now, many school systems are providing community-based vocational experiences for students prior to graduation. Expectations are changing! Parents are dreaming of **community employment** for their sons and daughters.
4. **Many individuals are too disabled to work.**	**Supported employment is intended for individuals with the "most" severe disabilities.** Success is a combination of matching an individual's abilities with job requirements while providing the necessary training and supports. By definition, supported employment is a "zero reject" model.
5. **Lack of transportation makes supported employment impossible.**	We create barriers! **We also can create solutions!** Many employment specialists have identified transportation solutions for their consumers under difficult constraints. It takes creative problem solving one step at a time. Network...find out how other programs have provided transportation. Information and solutions are available.
6. **Conversion is too expensive.**	Conversion should result in less overhead for an organization, since consumers are not housed in congregate facilities. **Ideally, there is no additional allocation of funding, rather reallocation of existing resources.** Overall, society benefits from placing consumers into community jobs. Successful programs who have converted have grown and developed a new way of doing business.
7. **The economic condition makes community employment impossible...too much competition for jobs.**	Organizations who have developed positive relationships with businesses have not been adversely affected by the economy. Good supported employment programs assist employers in analyzing their labor needs. This often results in the **development of positions for consumers** that are ideally suited to their skills and interests.
8. **Staff will leave the organization if asked to work with supported employment. "I just can't shift my paradigm this far. Leave me alone with the status quo!"**	**"There is nothing permanent except change."** (Heraclitus). In today's fast moving world, businesses that do not grow and change will become obsolete. As organizations change, some staff may choose to move on to other employment opportunities. However, it is the agency's responsibility to assist its staff in growing and meeting consumers' desires for community employment.

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A National Status Report on Conversion

There is ample national evidence of a dual system of center based and community integrated employment services for persons with significant disabilities. For example, the closure rates for state vocational rehabilitation counselors in Fiscal Year 1991 were very similar for persons in sheltered employment and those closed after receiving supported employment services. The Rehabilitation Services Administration reported that of the 202,831 persons closed rehabilitated in employment in Fiscal Year 1991 by State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, 5.4% (10,873) were closed in sheltered employment. In comparison, 5.6% of the 171,203 rehabilitants for whom information was available were closed after receiving supported employment services (U.S. D.O.E., 1992). Fiscal Year 1990 data for individuals served through state Mental Retardation/Developmental Disability Agencies indicated that sheltered employment (44%) was the most frequently used day or employment service, followed by day activity/day habilitation (37%), and supported employment (16%) (McGaughey, 1993).

Employment service organizations have expanded service options as the primary strategy for developing a supported employment service capacity. The FY 91 results of an annual national survey (of the 1,591 service organizations responding) indicated that only 15.2% reported downsizing or terminating other day services to convert resources to provide supported employment services. In comparison, 62% had expanded service options to include supported employment without notable reductions in prior levels of day services. Finally, 14.3% provided supported employment services only (Revell et all, in press). States reporting higher percentages of conversion included Michigan (42.7%), Vermont (32.6%), and New Hampshire (27.5%).

Follow-up discussions with representatives of funding agencies and local employment service organizations from these three states point to a number of common characteristics of a positive environment for conversion. The first is a demonstrated commitment to the value of community integrated employment, degree and type of disability not withstanding. States demonstrate commitment through incentive grants for conversion and through funding strategies that reimburse fairly for services and allow for resources to follow the individual. The second is leadership as demonstrated by a continuing investment in building consensus around the importance of community integrated services among direct service staff, board members, and persons utilizing services. The third is cooperation. The states of Michigan and New Hampshire utilize Medicaid Waiver funding for supported employment services at a level much higher than the national norm (G. Smith, personal communication, March 1, 1994). The development of this alternative funding resource reflects close state/local cooperation in the planning, costing, implementation, and management of the Waiver program. **The foundation to building a positive environment for conversion lies in some very core systems characteristics: clear vision, committed leadership, and goal directed cooperation.**

McGaughey, M.J., Kiernan, W.E., McNally, L.C., & Gilmore, D.S. (1993). National perspectives on integrated employment: State MR/DD agency trends. Boston: Children's Hospital, Training and Research Institute for People with Disabilities.

Revell, W.G., Wehman, P., Kregel, J., West, M., & Rayfield, R. (unpublished manuscript). Supported employment of persons with severe disabilities: Positive trends in wages, models, and funding. Richmond, VA.: Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment.

U.S. Department of Education. (1992). Annual report to the President and to the Congress on federal activities related to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Funding Conversion: Florida's Innovative Use of the Medicaid Waiver

Conversion as an issue "faded away" in Florida primarily as a function of funding. Initially, funds were specifically appropriated for supported employment and were prohibited from being used to expand developmental training programs (DTP) and sheltered work. Tied to that was a performance objective for the districts (the funding/contracting agent) to convert 5% of their "slots" from DTP each year for the next 5 years. So, new funds were targeted to supported employment and current funds were targeted to conversion in at least a small way.

In year three of this five year effort and again in year four, Developmental Services took significant budget reductions. Because there were no new funds to pay for supported employment, requiring conversion was not possible. In addition, before the next legislative session, there was a new state director whose mandate was to significantly expand federal revenues using Florida's Home and Community Based Services Waiver. Supported employment, since it was not "billable", went to the back burner along with the conversion effort as we knew it.

Now, "conversion" has really taken on an expanded meaning as the state of Florida has begun implementing the system changes which were written into the expanded HCBS waiver. A primary objective of the waiver, is to put that money "where our mouths have been" for so long - - to individualize and desegregate services for people with developmental disabilities. Florida has chosen to do that through a system of independent support coordination. Requirements for recertification for the support coordinators include making extensive use of typical community supports and services and brokering for individualized, nonsegregated services. As the system progresses, it will become increasingly imperative for provider agencies to change the model from which they operate. One of the first steps in implementing the changes written into the waiver was to eliminate provider contracts for waiver recipients. Funds for waiver services now follow the individual. If he/she leaves his/her current program, the dollars go with the individual to the next service. The potential impact is obvious.

So, conversion now describes moving from any facility based or segregated service model, to ones which are individualized, be it supported employment, supported living, or other inclusive activities. The challenge for both the providers and funders is how to effectively transition. I believe the same things will make this transition possible that facilitate conversion of workshop programs to supported employment--that is, shared values/commitment to the conversion, start-up funding, flexible requirements for utilization of current funding during the transition, relaxing of monitoring standards during transition, and targeted development funds or incentives. These things, combined with changing consumer demands seem the most likely ways to encourage and effect conversion.

Donna Allen
State of Florida, Dept. of Health and Rehabilitative Services

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Consumer's View on Employment

A message from Katherine:

HI! My name is Katherine Olson. I am 25 years old, live in a group home, and am mentally retarded. I work at Wendy's on Hopkins Road in Chesterfield County as a dining room attendant/hostess. I have been working there 2 and 1/2 years and **was Employee of the Month in October of 1992.**

I got my job through "Supported Work Services." I was assigned a job coach, and we looked and looked and looked for a job that I might be interested in. One day, we had lunch at a Wendy's and my job coach asked me if I thought I would like to do that kind of work. I said, YES! She spoke to the people at Wendy's about the program, and they interviewed me. **I GOT THE JOB!**

I clean all of the tables and counters, fill up the condiment stand, take the trays up and clean them, and make sure all of the chairs are pushed in. I also clean the bathrooms. I pick up the play area when the children leave. I help out with the drive-thru window workers too. I also let them know when the drink containers are empty.

My job coach, Teja Stokes, of Supported Work Services, helped me learn how to do my job duties. She stayed with me and did the job along beside me. Little by little, as I learned how to do the job myself, she would step aside and watch me and make sure I knew how to do it. Finally, I could do the job all by myself, so she left. She hasn't left me by myself though. She comes back every so often for my evaluation. If Wendy's feels I need to add more to my list of jobs, she will help train me to learn how to do it.

I love my job coach! She gives me life! If I didn't have my job coach, I wouldn't have found work, I wouldn't have been so well trained, and Wendy's wouldn't have such a great hostess. I would still be at home. I wouldn't have my own money. I wouldn't have my friends at Wendy's. I wouldn't have a place to go and help out every day. Wendy's needs me! I'm a valuable person to them! The customers love me and are like family to me.

I work 4 hours a day, 5 days a week and no weekends! I get paid every two weeks and use the money to support myself. I pay my rent, groceries, bills, buy clothing and gifts for others. I saved my money and bought my own bedroom furniture, a chair, a TV and stereo/CD/Tape player. **I PAY MY OWN WAY!**

Katherine Olson
dining room attendant/hostess

A message from Katherine's mother:

I am Katherine Olson's mother. I'm speaking to you as a mother of a disabled person--now called a "consumer". Our story probably isn't much different than thousands of other stories except for a few of the details, but that's why it, too, is important.

We've lived in Virginia for 23 years. Katherine, my daughter, is our fourth child and one of eight children. She was born with mental retardation (Williams Syndrome). She attended schools until she was 22 years old and received a diploma, because she was mainstreamed into all of the required courses.

When Katherine graduated in June of 1989, she had no job skills and no job opportunities. She had a diploma. We were not hopeful. We've been active on many committees for the mentally retarded, and we were only too well aware that the list of persons with disabilities that were waiting for jobs was not only long, but continually growing--not decreasing. We knew the story. No money...No one to train...No job available.

It was sad to see Katherine, a person who is so good with people and who was so busy with school and homework and projects become a person who had no where to go and had nothing to do. She watched a lot more TV, and you could see that little by little she was becoming lazier and lazier. No hope, you see. Nothing different or challenging to look forward to each day. No money of her own.

We were approached by residential services to see if Katherine was interested in a vacancy they had for a group home. If Katherine lived in a group home, she would have to be busy for 20 hours a week either at work or through volunteer work. If Katherine chose to live in a group home, Supported Work Services would be available to her. We jumped at the chance!

Teja Stokes was assigned to Katherine as her job coach. I was very impressed with her. She took time to get to know Katherine. She took her to lunch. She walked through the mall with her talking about each store, looking to see what kind of job would be available and whether or not Katherine would be interested in it. She let Katherine know she was interested in her. She treated Katherine with respect. You know the story. They had lunch at Wendy's, and Teja used the experience to tap into a possible job source.

Katherine loves her job. **She has a purpose. She has a reason to get up each day. She has a place to go. She has people who need her.** She earns her own money and uses it to support herself. She takes great pride in that...and so do I. She likes being like her older brothers and sisters--working, living on her own.

Lorayne F. Olson

Blueprint for Conversion

Whether an organization converts or dedicates its resources for community-based employment or expands its services to include community-based employment, the need for planning is crucial. As an organization changes from in-house services to services which are provided outside of its walls, the way of "doing business" changes. The focus shifts to outcome based management which requires support rather than supervision.

The following "blueprint" is one that has been used by a number of facilities which now provide predominately community-based services. While each organization will need to make its own "footprint", the steps remain consistent. Four steps of values clarification, planning, implementation, and future are explained in detail.

For an organization to have a blueprint which will succeed, participation from all levels, in fact everyone in the organization, is mandatory. Change brings out fear in everyone even those who support the need. By including all involved, fear is reduced, and true team building becomes possible.

Blueprint

Organizations must look inward in an honest and sincere way. Person centered services can only occur when the organization examines its values by looking at its mission with commitment and understanding. This blueprint is just a guide to the questions organizations need to be asking as community-based employment becomes a reality.

Step I: Values Clarification

1. **What is the organization's mission?**
   Most organizational missions speak to the concept of independence, "least restrictive environment", and choice. Does your organization really believe and live up to its mission statement?

2. **Is the organization's mission evident in the services it provides?**
   The organization must support and demonstrate their mission through its services. There should be no confusion. If community inclusion is the organization's value, community inclusion should be evident for all to see.

3. **Do consumers and staff support and understand the organization's mission?**
   Everyone including the individuals served by the organization, staff, Board of Directors, and community at large should understand the organizational mission and commitment. Again, there should be clarity at every level including policy/procedures, brochures, and resource commitment.

Step II: Planning

1. **Is everyone involved "on the same page?"**
   This phase of planning should examine the mission and philosophy, making changes or realignments as necessary.

2. **Are organizational strategies sound, organized, and well thought out?**
   Clarity of strategies for success are essential. Many organizations make the mistake of adding one position such as a job coach and feel that they have begun a supported employment program. Many fail, as consideration has not been given to the lack of support, coverage for sick and vacation time, isolation, and a general lack of knowledge. Strategies must be sound, organized, and well thought out with all of the players identified and responsibilities clearly defined.

3. **Has the organization identified adequate resources in the following areas?**

   Consumers--The organization must identify individuals with disabilities who want employment and must familiarize the individuals who they serve with employment options. If a choice does not exist, then there is no choice. The choice must be given regardless of the "functioning level" of the individual, parental concerns, transportation, social security issues, behavioral challenges, etc.

Blueprint for Conversion

Step II: Planning (continued)

Staff--The planning process must allow staff members to question new strategies for service delivery, express their fears about new ways of operating, and even their concerns about obsolescence.
Funding--The trickiest part is identifying and converting existing resources. The planning process has to find the funding to support the change. In addition to existing funding, many organizations have explored expanding sources such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), local/county governments, United Way, Community Chests, etc. Others have added new funding sources such as Economic Development Councils, foundation grants, exceptional education, and vocational education with local school systems, state change grants, etc.

4. **Are objectives measured in terms of quality outcomes rather than process?**
As the planning process continues, objectives must be measured in terms of quality outcomes rather than process. Defining a quality outcome determines the success of the plan. The organization must begin to measure its worth by the satisfaction of its consumers rather than the size of its buildings or budgets.

5. **Has the organization developed an organized plan to minimize risk?**
Converting or dedicating a substantial portion of an organization's resources involves risk. Organizations who follow an organized planning process minimize their risk and have control of the change process.

Step III: Implementation

1. **Do staff communicate regularly and in a defined manner about organizational progress?**
As the plans become operational, it is imperative to communicate regularly and in a defined manner about the organization and progress. With the best of planning processes, challenges arise that no one ever considered. These details must be discussed and worked into the fabric of the plan.

2. **Are record systems designed around desired outcomes rather than required**
Systems must be developed which allow the organization to identify and document its progress, success, and areas of concern. These systems should be designed around the outcomes desired rather than the paperwork required.

3. **Are evaluations shared with all stakeholders and used for future planning?**
An evaluation method must be developed which looks at the quality of the outcomes and the progress made. This evaluation should be shared with all stakeholders and used for future planning.

4. **Is the process continually being revised based on the evaluation results?**
After the evaluation is studied, the process must be started again beginning with values clarification.

Step IV: Future

1. **Is there an ongoing examination of the results?**
There must be an ongoing examination which includes quality measures, outcomes, and factors which impact such as identification of new populations, economic conditions, level of sophistication of the organization, and so forth.

2. **Are systems designed and redesigned to ensure ongoing control of quality and resources?**
Community-based services are very different from in-house services. Therefore, the future of the organization depends on its ability to control its costs, resources, and outcomes.

3. **Is the organization working as a team for success?**
Whether you implement TQM (Total Quality Management) or just use good management skills, all facets of the organization must work in concert for success. The organization's future again will depend on its continuous commitment to quality outcomes.

4. **Does the organization continue to articulate and demonstrate its understanding, commitment, and dedication to its mission?**
The organization's future is dependent on mission driven staff, boards of directors, systems, and community.

Barriers to Successful Conversion

The individual's right to inclusion in community employment, living arrangement, and other services such as recreation is the force which drives an organization to change its method of operation. The handwriting is "on the wall" with the implementation of the American's with Disabilities Act, the development of priorities by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and the changes in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. The outlook for our economy indicates a continued shift to a communication and service emphasis. Yet, the vocational rehabilitation industry has not positioned itself to play a role in the future world economy.

Contract work that has little training value and focuses on an individual's disabilities vs. abilities creates barriers to employment. Community-based employment programs offer an alternative and allow consumers to be in control of directing the services that they want. Freedom is the ultimate economic, social, and political impact of conversion. The opportunity to choose a life-style, gain self-esteem, and enjoy the quality of life that is available to individuals without disabilities also must be available to individuals with disabilities. Review the following statements and decide if you are creating barriers to employment or facilitating community access.

"Disability Focus" vs. "Ability Focus"	
The focus is on identifying an individual's limitations in order to design training programs that will prepare the person to function in community settings. The assumption is that the individual must gain specific skills before access to a job is provided. Staff from a program that focuses on disability would say...	**An ability focus assumes that every individual is "ready" to work given support and training. Instruction occurs in the community where the individual actually needs to perform skills. Staff from a program that focuses on ABILITIES would say....**
Since Jean is severely mentally retarded, she can only work in a sheltered workshop with one to two assembly line tasks.	Jean can work in a supported employment position with one to two job duties.
Mary is not a candidate for supported employment. She steals food from the workshop kitchen every chance she gets.	Mary can be matched to a job in the community that limits her access to food and provides support for positive behaviors.
I asked Betty if she wanted a job. She said that she wanted to stay at the day activity center.	Is Betty making an "informed" choice about community employment? Have we allowed her to sample different community work experiences? Maybe we need to pursue additional experiences.
John is "not ready" to work in a real job. His production in the sheltered workshop is only 25%. Besides, he doesn't come to work regularly.	John is probably bored with the workshop task or resents the subminimum wages. Let's try finding him a job in the community based on his current skills and interests.
Robert can't work in the community, because I read in his records that he has a problem grabbing women's breasts.	We can't assume that the behavior will occur in the community just because it is noted in Robert's records. Has this been a problem recently and under what conditions? Can the problem be minimized with a good job match?
Sue is physically aggressive when staff try to prompt her to complete her work. No employer is going to accept that kind of behavior.	We need to design a training program that teaches Sue to work successfully. Have we looked at her response to different prompting procedures and identified appropriate reinforcers?

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Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment

Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment was funded in October 1993 for a third, 5-year period by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Grant #H133B30071. The RRTC provides research, training, and leadership on supported employment for citizens with the most severe disabilities. Research at the Center focuses on supported employment policy analysis, program implementation at the systems and consumer levels, and program evaluation issues. The RRTC provides training for rehabilitation counselors, program managers, employment specialists, educators, university students, employers, parents, and other persons interested in supported employment. For further information write to VCU-RRTC, P.O. Box 842011, Richmond, VA 23284-2011.

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Announcing Two New Manuals!

Designing Community-Based Vocational Programs for Students with Severe Disabilities
(Edited by: Katherine J. Inge & Paul Wehman)

The purpose of this publication is to provide information on designing and implementing a community-based vocational training program for students with severe disabilities. Included is information on labor laws, strategies for designing a training program, and actual case study examples of students in training programs as well as supported employment. Target audience includes teachers, transition coordinators, special education supervisors, parents, and other individuals interested in facilitating employment for students with severe disabilities.
Available: Book or Audio Cassette, $12.95

Increasing Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities through Economic Development: Creating Business and Corporate Initiatives
(Dale Verstegen & John Nietupski)

The purpose of the publication is to assist supported employment personnel in developing state and regional business and corporate initiatives. The three chapters of this publication follow a program planning process that the authors recommend for the establishment of the initiatives.
Available: Book or Audio Cassette, $8.95

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